

Best Care EAP Health WORKS

A NEWSLETTER TO PROMOTE HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

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Learning: A Life-Long Journey

by Ginny Hermann

Children and adults alike will be lining up to shop for this year's back-to-school supplies. Whether it's a yoga class or an advanced degree course, many adults are going back to class. "Life-long learning is the spoke that runs through life," says Julie Wagner, Ph.D., RN, Chairperson for Continuing Education at Nebraska Methodist College, Omaha, Nebraska. "Learning satisfies a natural sense of inquiry. It creates an inner feeling of wisdom and an awareness of yourself, others and your community."

According to Wagner, learning is the ultimate example of the "use it or lose it" theory. Learning something new or sharing your knowledge with someone sharpens the mind and nurtures the spirit. With subjects ranging from art and journaling to astronomy and biology, there is a field of study for everyone.

"When deciding on a program, it's best to start by looking at what makes life meaningful for you," says Wagner. "Areas of study should be based on need,



interest and your stage in life." Wagner also stresses that life-long learning isn't restricted to the classroom. Enrichment opportunities are found in day seminars, on-line classes, book clubs, colleges, churches, art studios, zoos, museums, dance studios...the possibilities are endless.

Although many adults seek educational fulfillment for pleasure, others choose to return to college to enhance their job skills. Technological advances and workplace changes mean workers may need to brush-up on or enhance their skills. Degrees of higher learning and specialized certification programs help workers keep a competitive edge or open the door to better opportunities.

Because most adult students continue to work while attending college, juggling a career, home, family, social

commitments and school can seem nearly impossible. According to Liz Miller, Best Care EAP Consultant, balance is the key to surviving and thriving both inside and outside of the classroom. Miller knows the importance of balance first hand — this wife and mother of three recently earned her master's degree in Adult Education Performance and Development while working full-time. She credits a system called SPISE for helping her stay on target. SPISE stands for Spiritual, Physical, Intellectual, Social and Emotional needs. According to Miller, finding the right balance in these areas and nurturing each consistently leads to

"Learning is a treasure that will follow its owner everywhere."

- Chinese Proverb

a happier, more fulfilling life.

The trick is finding the right balance and sticking to it. "My first semester was a difficult period of adjustment, so I began to skip exercising because I thought I was too busy," Miller says. "I started

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feeling tired. By disrupting my physical need for exercise, I threw off my balance and lacked the energy I needed to meet my goals. Once I started my daily exercise routine again, I had my old energy back.” She also made time for social interaction, volunteer programs, family and spirituality, which provided the balance needed to do more and keep a better frame of mind.

Life-long learning is a life-long journey, and Best Care EAP is here to help. “We try to help people enjoy the journey and avoid focusing solely on the end result,” says Miller.

EAP counselors provide information, guidance and support to anyone interested in recognizing and identifying areas of balance, improving attitude and focus, overcoming obstacles and more.

Call Best Care EAP at (402) 354-8000 or (800) 666-8606 for more information.

Dealing With Change: The College Years

by Ginny Hermann

The passage from high school to college is a milestone that can be smooth sailing for some families and turbulent for others. Many young adults make the switch with grace, quickly acclimating to the responsibilities of newfound freedom. However, other students find the sudden independence, unusual surroundings and increasing demands more difficult. Some parents meet this time with stress and confusion too. Experts agree that communication and understanding are the keys to a smooth transition for both college-bound students and their parents.

The college experience can be fun and exciting. However, unfamiliar living quarters, instructors, peers and expectations make this a time of growth and self-awareness as well. “For many students, this is the first time they must schedule their own time. Suddenly,



there is no one to get them up in the morning, make sure they eat right and get to class on time,” says Kris Stenberg, Dean of Students at Nebraska Methodist College, Omaha, Nebraska. “This adjustment period can be stressful, so it is best for freshmen and their parents to approach the first semester as a time for the student to find her own way.” Students can learn the ropes by connecting with others who have successfully weathered that first semester.

Some parents find this a challenging time as well. “Parents experience significant changes, whether this is the first child going off to college or the fifth,” says Stenberg. Some parents see their college-bound child as their next step toward old age. Those facing an *empty nest* often feel abandoned or unimportant once the child is gone. If these feelings affect you, look for ways to embrace your freedom. Take a class, try a new hobby, go on a cruise or redecorate your home. Stenberg also suggests talking with other parents who have been there and can share their coping strategies.



Stressed Out?

At times, even the most dedicated student may feel strained. Liz Miller, Best Care EAP Consultant, suggests the following strategies to help you succeed:

- Recognize your stress symptoms and how to relieve them.
- Examine the SPISE areas of your life. Degrees of balance vary and can change periodically, you may need to fine-tune your balance plan as you go.
- Listen to your body. Don't neglect yourself, and try to fit exercise into your schedule.
- Communicate with those around you and be open about your needs.
- Prioritize. Realize that you can't do it all.
- Learn to say no in order to avoid overextending yourself.
- Plan time for you. Just 15 minutes of private time can do wonders.

Help Your Child Focus on School

by Ginny Hermann

Today's children face a multitude of distractions that often interfere with focused classroom learning. School violence, problems at home, bad attitudes and shifting priorities can preoccupy students when they should be concentrating on reading, writing and arithmetic. Taking an active role in your child's education can help keep him focused on school performance. It is important for parents to understand their child's unique situation and create a buffer zone between unwanted distractions and effective learning.

Elementary school students find distractions everywhere. A sudden snowfall, interrupted sleep or missed breakfast can cause a student's classroom interest to fade. School related problems, like teasing and bullying, or changes at home, like divorce, a new school or a new baby, can make it hard to concentrate on schoolwork. Parental involvement and a good parent-teacher relationship are powerful methods of resolving distraction at this age.

When a child goes to middle school, she enters a different world. New classmates, difficult subjects and increased expectations, added to the physical and emotional changes that occur at this age, cause some

students to feel overwhelmed and out of control. Experts say it is especially important for parents to communicate openly with middle schoolers. Make yourself available and be supportive whenever issues arise. Good parental supervision, especially after school, can help prevent boredom and unruly behavior.

High school students enjoy freedoms and responsibilities they've never had before, but along with these opportunities come distractions, like competition, peer pressure, romantic crushes and popularity issues. Parental supervision and interaction is essential to keep issues in perspective. Talk openly about the tough subjects, like sex, drugs and alcohol, and emphasize the importance of responsible decision



making. It is also helpful to talk to other parents about how they handle difficult situations.

Best Care EAP provides support and counseling on a variety of parental topics. Counselors are available to answer questions and recommend tools to help your child excel in school.

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Although most students relish the idea of gaining independence from home and family, homesickness can make even the most dedicated student lose focus and enthusiasm. "Students who experience homesickness should not be embarrassed about it," says Stenberg. "Those who experience it need to be assured that others feel that way too."

Best Care EAP offers counseling services to help parents and dependent, college-age students manage the stresses associated with the college years.

Best Care EAP is a unique benefit provided to you by your employer. It is a free assessment, short-term counseling and referral service to help you and your dependent family members work through personal problems that may adversely affect home and work relationships. If a referral to an outside agency or specialist is made, only then do expenses become your responsibility. To arrange a confidential appointment, call

**(402) 354-8000
or (800) 666-8606.**

For more information about Best Care EAP, check us out at: www.BestCareEAP.org

Back-To-School Tips for Students of All Ages

- ◆ Say good-bye to summer with an end-of-the-season party.
- ◆ Ease into the idea of school by talking about it several weeks before the big day. What is each person's favorite thing about school? Which classmates is she looking forward to seeing again? What is his favorite subject?
- ◆ Focus on the positive aspects of returning to school and find ways to make the coming year the best yet.
- ◆ Create a special study area where each student can devote his full attention to the task at hand.
- ◆ Get back into the habit of studying by designating a short period of time each evening to quiet reading.
- ◆ Jump-start a student's curiosity about areas of interest with frequent trips to the library.
- ◆ Post a family calendar to keep track of deadlines, special events and other important dates.
- ◆ Limit television watching to allow for study and family time.
- ◆ Start an early bedtime ritual a few weeks before school begins.
- ◆ Relax. Teach by example, learning is an enjoyable journey that lasts a lifetime.

